
Emory's Journal

Tuesday, April 28, 1970

Students in great crowds again, but this time with a slightly carnival atmosphere, unlike the tragedies of last fall. I emerge from the elevator in Old Main and find myself struggling through a mass of students outside Edward Williams' office. They spill over into the foyer and the hallways. "What is this?" I ask a golden-green-tressed, tank-shirted, barehooved young satyr leaning against the wall.

"Swallows," he says, with an abrupt single shrug of the shoulders—up, down, then nothing, a pithy burst of articulation.

It is the Second Annual Complaint over Administrative Decision to Hose the Swallow Nests from the Library Walls. The Vice-President for Business likes things shipshape. The responding cry is repression, ecological insanity, and insensitivity to other living things. An underground newspaper shouts that the swallows have been mercilessly murdered at night in clandestine darkness, clear proof that conspiracy and evil tread upon and control our lives. Since the recent day when ecological became political (or vice versa) there have been representatives of the Movement outside Ed's door. I note the presence of Eleanor Silver, our ecological politician, and Carter Jeremy, our political ecologist, in uneasy semantic alliance and a few young faculty in the background trying to make sure that the students have the courage of their convictions. The students are sitting cross-legged or lying flat on their backs or propping themselves against walls in the most recent narcissistic self-parodies, waiting for Ed to appear for the great and serious game of confrontation. I recognize a few of my students, the regulars, like Margie Burke, and the not-so-committed but with-it, like Olivia Scott. Vance Martin is, as usual, the self-appointed student leader. Martin stands out from the others, somewhat pudgy-faced, a bit overweight, with the appearance of having been quite well taken care of by Mama. He is booted, in green fatigues, and—in contrast to the others—Maoistically short-haired and cleanly shaved. In my eighth-grade days he

would some time have forced the rest of us to pants him. He has always—through the construction strike in the fall and through the violence that followed—maintained his hair and face as a symbol setting him apart from or above the others, even though his rhetoric calls for the complete people's democracy.

Martin begins to inveigh against the forces of repression. Edward Williams, that supreme actor, that man with a mask, my old and perplexing friend, appears at his door and adopts the most circuitous possible route to the center of the foyer, stepping over and around the assembled bodies with elaborate, falsely *sotto voce* "Pardon me's." He diminishes attention to Martin's attack against mindless bureaucracy by his acrobatic determination to reach the center of the foyer. In the process he expresses his good will to all. He has come to know most of these students by name over the past year of demonstrations and disruption, and it is interesting to observe his insistence on their being known to him. Having reached the geographical center of the crowd, he faces directly away from Martin, who has had to reconsider his situation. Williams begins to speak: There are two sides to the issue, and he will summarize arguments on both. He will begin by taking Martin's views and restating them clearly and briefly: Swallows are part of the environment; acts of hosing are arrogant, bureaucratic, undemocratic, and aesthetically offensive to a large proportion of the human population. Further, they are against the trend toward greater ecological sophistication. (The students are reasonably quiet; there is an occasional "Right on" and some shifting about as additions to the crowd arrive by elevator directly into the foyer.) Ed proceeds then to the other side of the question: Swallows are a part of the environment, but anyone who has ever visited San Juan Capistrano Mission during their annual appearance there would have seen that the human environment can be polluted by a localized swallow explosion, for they are dirty, carry mites, and make a mess beneath their nests, which happen to be located directly over the entrance to the library; the acts of hosing have been carried out by conscientious people who may or may not be ecologically sophisticated and who have as their task to keep the building clean; presumably they would take a similar attitude toward the human beast if a group of such creatures were to defecate hourly on the library steps. (Scattered cheers and shouts such as "Do it!") Both attitude and behavior are indeed bureaucratic, but so are garbage disposal and street cleaning, activities which maintain civilization, such as it is, and do provide people with jobs. (Some students detect a certain wit in this discourse and are visibly amused. Some sulk. Some seethe. I now see that the group is being split by Ed's tone.) While the attack on

the swallows is aesthetically offensive to some of the people, so is the residue of swallow nests on the building to others. All in all, there is an argument on both sides. It is the arrogance of uncritical belief to rush in mindlessly without recognizing this. As someone who decided after years of co-existence to fight the swallows on his summer home porch, an attack of mites having convinced him, he has experienced the feelings implicit in both views. He will discuss the matter with the vice-president for business; perhaps they can reach a solution that will save some of the nests in less offensive places, perhaps not. In the meantime he is late to a meeting of the Black Caucus, who deserve his time more than this assembled multitude, for the swallows, library or no library, at least have a wide variety of choices as to where to live. He asks the crowd please to clear a path to the elevator. A path is cleared through a crowd of Pre-Raphaelite-coiffed young women, and he proceeds to the elevator, hand in rear pocket. He enters and faces the assembly, grinning as the doors close. The mask of comedy.

Cries of "You haven't answered us" come from a few. Martin speaks fervently again of administrative deceit, of scientific proof that swallows are not carriers of mites, that the People must keep a round-the-clock guard on the library to prevent further murder. His speech rings with the imagery of bloodshed and mayhem. The vacant post-Pre-Raphaelite faces under Pre-Raphaelite coifs are filled with plangent emotion. However, when the class bell rings, the crowd drifts away, some in good humor, and Martin with them, surrounded by them, speaking still. I watch Eleanor Silver talking very quietly and intimately to Olivia Scott and two other students, who listen intently. I wish to rush over, shouting, "You are all being seduced," but I do not. Eleanor doesn't seem to have paid much attention to Martin. She is absorbed in her own audience, small as it is, but select. Does she really feel the swallows from the inside? Hard to imagine. I wonder what she is saying. Her intensity and the urgency she communicates whet my curiosity. I assume that I shall have to talk my most voluble advisee, Olivia Scott, down from her own winged self later in the week. And perhaps that is what bothers me most.

Tonight I ask why I have reported this relatively trivial event. I look back to those violent weeks in November when I began this journal and note that I have carefully reported the construction strike, the blasts, and deaths. I was saying to myself then that in this journal I should explore the possibilities of style, that as a professor of literature it is a responsibility to *do* and not merely to teach, or rather to *do* in order to know better what one teaches. But if I had really felt such necessity I should have been attempting a novel or some poems or a play and not

this curious rambling and discontinuous discourse. Certainly it is an expression of anxiety, begun in a time of indecision and unrest in our little society and in the society at large. I have mentioned the trivial incident of the swallows because—well—I am on my guard. We are all on our guards. Who knows what single event may spark us toward denouement? The form of what I write here is perhaps the burden of a man condemned by years of professional work to the role of critic, even of his own verbal motives. Whether I can any longer tolerate the mask of professional development, merely as mask, remains to be seen. Perhaps that question will even provide the drama of my discourse.

I shall maintain the mask for the form's sake: Two things are noticeable as I read back through the writing of the last few months. First, I do not quite recognize what I shall call the journal's "I." Second, this curious I, who seems resistant to me, now has begun to focus frequently on Edward Williams. As I read even the previous few pages I imagine some curiously constructed I watching Williams. I have not decided yet whether this odd removal is in the nature of things—for instance in the language that is not merely mine but also public and thus both mine and not mine, or whether it is a way of displacing the anxiety that may have generated the whole enterprise. Nor is the I—the I that at this very moment insists that this is a problem—necessarily the I that I should like to be, for it, too, is at once captured by a language that manages to resist me and have, in part, its own way. The real I, therefore, recedes silently and furtively behind a regress of linguistic fictions, while I remain somehow a stranger to what should be my own expression. It makes me wonder whether I exist in any real sense; perhaps my reality is merely this act of disappearing into the appearance of these fictions. If that is the case, do I make my persona into my true I? Do I really want this? Is success also annihilation, or transformation? How frightening: every time I write out my consideration of this situation I add another I to the regress! How frightening, considering the difficulties that I have always encountered in making conventional fictions. I have been a critic who analyzes but does not create literary texts—except that when I introduce an I into my critical discourse there is, even there, I suppose, the question of whether it is not also a fictive I.

Words. Words have always been other to me, the written page deliberately another self, so to speak. Not for Ed Williams, who was always playing with words, for whom they were never separate from his every action. And whose actions, come to think of it, seem to be his own self.

I recall expressions he used when we were both kids—back in what must have been our senior year at Shoreham: "Heavens to Betsy,

Jack,"—he was using the term playfully in mimicry of our basketball coach, who was prone to epithets like "land's sakes": Ed had resuscitated a whole family of expressions that he imagined were of this homely variety. They even creep into his talk today, incorporated by his acting self. Soon the whole basketball team was using them, even in games. The fact was that Ed's words were like a virus to us. He had made his remark in connection with some piece of satirical fiction I was doing for the *Spectator* and was reading aloud to him in the *Spectator* office. "That's real purty, all right, but you sure do have the most constipated fictional style around here." And he proceeded to declaim with outrageous gestures several lines of gibberish in anapestic tetrameter in as offensively lilted a manner as possible. Way back then he was the supreme player.

Ed invented words on the spot. According to his own account, he had invented twenty-seven gibberish names for his dog, each intensively employed for no more than three or four months. At fifteen, he claimed to have written a whole novel, or more precisely a fictive world history, in a private language only two other people knew—both friends his age. At Shoreham he corresponded with these two others, one of whom had begun to make a dictionary of his language. "You'd do something like that," he said to me once a few years ago when he was irritated at me for some reason. It was a shot at the literary scholar, a partial jest. The boy who started that dictionary gave up, because under Ed's dominance the language underwent incredibly swift linguistic change, each page out of date by the time of its completion. Let's see: sophomore year, a visit to Ed's house when he was in a regressive state and was tormenting his mother by speaking to her in this language. Some of it she had come to understand in a rudimentary way, but mostly it made her anxious. She seemed to hold a grudge against it. For several years it had so monopolized Ed's and his friends' time that it had become necessary to explain him and her whole family to the mothers of his friends. She was convinced they regarded him as a *bad influence*. On the day I visited he threatened to write a grammar of his language, by that time nearly dead. His old friends, Cliff and Denny, he said, could still be interviewed—the last natives, anthropological objects, for what sparse information survived.

I remember his mother taking me aside and explaining in a high voice that their dog had suffered a nervous skin disease, which she regarded as a direct result of its possessing twenty-seven different names. Ed came through the door from the kitchen at this moment, drinking from a big Royal Crown Cola bottle and speaking a gibberish that I assume was this now archaic tongue. He paused to assert in

English that if the Eskimos could have hundreds of different names for snow and the Arabs countless delineations of the camel, the Garbleatrians, namely himself, Cliff, and Denny, could have twenty-seven names for his dog, who was of many moods and was referred to in English merely by the quite inadequate name of Otis. It is not surprising that when one is around Ed for any length of time one imagines almost that one is in a novel. I'm not sure that Ed's wife knew what she was involved with at the start. He drags us all into the world he makes.

Wednesday, April 29, 1970

Let me consider. All that I have said about writing this journal insists that I am writing it to myself—all that business about the "I." But as I read it over—especially the observations and remembrances of Ed Williams—the style implies that there is a "you" involved. I do not know this you even as well as the I. I do not even know why my writing I, the I of my narrative, or language itself—whichever it is—should insist on the presence of this you, on somehow addressing it. Is it a surreptitious fictional you that I wish to pretend into existence because I would like really to be telling all of this to someone? Is "you" not at all a psychological necessity but a necessity of the language? Is a linguistic necessity also a psychological one? Must a separate you be eternally present, always given consideration in spite of my consciously stated request to my own words that everything remain part of a transaction between my numerous I's and myself? I am told that the condition of storytelling is an audience. Ed's language has an audience and a design upon that audience, as with the students yesterday. I introduce the inadequate subterfuge that I am merely practicing at an art, for I must not worry this problem into a theoretical essay, which is the bent of this paragraph and ultimately my bent. In short, I am my own you. Ed's you is all of us—We.

But perhaps Ed has come to dominate those paragraphs that do not take a theoretical or simply confused tack for rather simple reasons. He is near the center of our local anxiety by virtue of his position, and his existence takes on some communal symbolic meaning beyond his own he. Our lives entangled for so long, Ed, gathering in my gaze, forces me to take stock, as if he were the medium by which I present my I to you. Yet I do not recognize my remembrances as containing a solid, real I or any of the possibly present I's, upon which I have mused above. These past I's seem merely he's to me now, people that I have somehow passed through. They are odd and mysterious to me. Yet Ed is a continuum and gathers us around him.

Thursday, April 30, 1970

Ridiculous. At midnight, after the library closed, the buildings-and-grounds people attempted to hose the library again. It is said that Ed asked them to delay at least until President Franklin returned, but he was ignored. This time the workers were met by Martin's band of students, who had anticipated the dastardly deed. Further, one of the hoses, left there from the previous efforts of two nights ago, had been plugged by a gummy plastic substance and apparently ruined. When informed of this at home, the vice-president for business called the campus police. It is a silly matter. Only a few swallows had really gotten very far toward rebuilding their nests, and now the dean of architecture is furious because some of the swallows flew to the architecture quadrangle to try to build there.

When the available campus night force arrived—all three or four of them, I presume—they were confronted by Martin, Eleanor Silver, and their entourage of activists. A long wrangling discussion got nowhere. The police, perhaps with orders to be cool, attempted to clear the area, first by a sort of bluffing authority and then by cajolery; and Martin, Eleanor, and the students were willing to give way only if what we have now come to call a "dialogue" were to occur. (This is known as educating the forces of reaction.) If it had not been for Martin, I am told, there would have been no hosing (for the buildings-and-grounds people were losing heart), but Martin, not content with Eleanor's plan to conquer by dialogue, still less by promise of her success, sought to rally his followers from the library steps. Beside him was Margie Burke, strictly non-Pre-Raphaelite, sometimes referred to as Martin's Id, who punctuated his sentences with shouts of encouragement and assorted invective against the buildings-and-grounds people, until one of them turned the hose on her. She was standing on the marble lion at the time, scrambled down, and fell on Martin. Shrieking and bellowing ensued, followed by a brief struggle for possession of the hose, the police quickly retreating before a superior force of students. I have not heard clearly reported what role Eleanor Silver played from this point on. It may very well be that she retired quietly or remained, as some have accused her, in the middle of the fracas. With or without her, the students carried the day. The buildings-and-grounds people departed in sodden disarray, and the police prudently realized that the retreat had in itself restored order. The students remained for a while to hear each other's oratory and to celebrate their victory over the forces of oppression, which had once again proved their capacity for ruthlessness.

I doubt, however, that much will come of this. The police will be commended by some for keeping their heads, vilified by others for repressive tactics. The scuffles that occurred were no more violent than those that took place, say, on Class Day in a simpler time at Shoreham when we had the junior-senior tug-of-war and the point was for everyone to get as muddy and soaked as possible. It is Ed's remark that the Shoreham event was a formal scheduled ritual. This one was a happening, with the required political overtone in the approved current style—nonritually ritualistic. Perhaps more people should have been involved, if the real purpose was to let off steam. There is still plenty to let off around here. How discouraging it must be for those who would seriously organize for political ends, struggling with a tradition of triviality!

This morning I saw Ed for coffee in the commons. He has taken to brief morning visits there. It is called mixing with the troops. The ubiquitous Martin strolled by, and Ed looked up, a friendly ironical half-smile on his face, to say, "Vance, why, I hear you were all wet last night—as usual." Martin looked down, startled, then looked to the ceiling and laughed. He passed majestically on to his usual table, where his clique was assembled. Ed's face turned hard as he helped himself to the milk. He does not dislike Martin, but he disapproves of him in some way that is hidden under his own surface. He plays an odd game with the young man, treating him like another chieftain. But the treatment is ironic, and it is almost malicious, and so designed. Maybe Martin appreciates his ploys. Come to think of it, Ed regards me with an ironic eye from time to time and has been known to talk right on top of my—I like to think—reasonable voice.